

Description

VIDEO RECORDER HAVING USER EXTENDED AND AUTOMATICALLY EXTENDED TIME SLOTS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of Video Recorder having Extended and Automatically Extended Time Slots filed on April 21, 2003 as U.S. patent application 10/249,575.

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BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates generally to systems that transfer broadcast content to volatile and/or non-volatile storage devices.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The capture of broadcast content gained major popularity with the advent of the VCR. A user was able to tune their television to a station that had a show that they wanted to save and they simply inserted a storage device (e.g., a VHS tape), moved the tape to the appropriate location, and began capturing the broadcast. Recently, other types of equipment have developed to perform similar functionality. These types of equipment include, for instance, DVD recorders (DVD-R) and set-top boxes that include digital video recorders.

[0005] Both of these types of equipment are used in a manner that is similar to the operation of VCRs. Each has its own storage device (i.e., a DVD or hard drive) and each storage device is of finite space. If a user is saving a long program, multiple programs, or begins saving the program when the storage device is nearly full, there is a chance that the program the user is trying to save will be lost.

This is a frustrating problem for the average user, specifically when they want to save content when they are away from the home.

SAVING BROADCAST CONTENT

[0006] Saving broadcast content in its simplest form comprises turning on the television set and pressing a button on a VCR. More recently, VCRs, DVD-Rs, and digital video recorders (DVR), include interfaces which allow users to schedule the transfer of programs at a later date or time. Using this interface, the user is able to give the device a time and a channel and when it is the right time the device tunes to the channel, and begins saving the program. This is useful, for instance, when the user is away from home and wants to see the program later.

[0007] Another modern interface allows the user to focus on a favorite program. For instance, a user may love Monday Night Football, which occurs every Monday night from 6:00 P.M to 9:00 P.M. So, the user may wish to transfer this broadcast to a storage device regardless of whether they are home or not and may not want to have to instruct the machine every time. Using the interface, the user is able to set the system to save content for the three hours on Monday night when the football game is broadcast ev-

ery week.

TUNER CONFLICTS

[0008] However, these schemes are inadequate because conflicts may arise in the scheduling system. Typically, a system is limited by the number of tuners it has. A one tuner system, for instance can either be used to save a program on a specific channel or watch the channel, however, the system cannot save content on one station and be used to watch another station. A two tuner system can be used to transfer and watch two different stations. Situations arise, however, where the system has been given instructions to transfer multiple shows simultaneously and there are not enough available tuners to perform this function.

SHOW PRIORITIZATION

[0009] One technique prioritizes shows scheduled to be transferred and when a conflict arises only the highest priority show is transferred. This technique is limited, however, because sometimes a user extends a timeslot in the transfer schedule to a few minutes before and a few minutes after the actual show. The user might do this because, for instance, they might want to save part of a pre-game show for a sports event, or they might want to save

content after a sports event, if it goes into overtime. Moreover, the system might automatically extend time slots by brief periods automatically to avoid missing content if the broadcaster's clock and the system's clock are out of sync or if the broadcast starts a few minutes early or late.

[0010] In such a case, a conflict may arise solely because of a user extended or automatically extended time slot. If these additional time slots are not treated as separate entities, unexpected results may occur. For instance a high priority first show may override a lower priority second show and cause the second show to not be saved merely because the first show overlapped the second show by an automatically extended minute or two. Such a result is clearly inadequate.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0011] The present invention is directed to a video recorder having user extended and automatically extended time slots. An embodiment of the present invention includes a set-top box having an internal storage device, such as a hard drive where broadcasts are transferred from a broadcast input source to the storage device and are played back from the storage device to an output device, such as a

television or computer monitor. The set-top box displays a graphical user interface (GUI) and an interactive program guide (IPG) on the output device. The IPG displays a list of shows that are available by tuning to different channels at different times as well as descriptions and details about each show. The GUI allows the user to navigate through the IPG, for instance, by viewing different times and dates for broadcasts, and also allows the user to view the shows that are scheduled to be transferred to the storage device in the future, and the shows that have already been transferred to the storage device.

[0012] The GUI also allows the user to utilize a video recorder, for instance by navigating the IPG and selecting broadcasts to later transfer to the storage device. The user may select one or more broadcasts, or may repeatedly transfer the same program in a series to the storage device. The user has the option to extend the time slot, in which a show is scheduled to be transferred to the storage device. The time slot may be extended before the show, after the show, or both. The system also implements an automatic extension of the time slot by default. Automatically extended time is used to ensure that the data is completely captured to the system, in case the broadcast time and

the set-top box time are slightly out of sync or the broadcaster unexpectedly begins a show's broadcast slightly early or late.

[0013] Each show is given a priority either automatically or manually. Each user extended and automatically extended timeslot is also prioritized. When a conflict arises, the present invention generates solutions to the conflicts. When a conflict is merely multiple shows that overlap, various factors are used to determine which show is the highest priority. When a user extended or automatically extended time slot causes a conflict, then the extended time slots are prioritized separately from the actual show and the algorithms attempt to resolve conflicts by removing user extended or automatically extended time slots.

[0014] In one embodiment, where there are several solutions to a conflict, the system automatically finds the shows that, when removed from the transfer schedule, will result in the most shows of the highest priority to be transferred. Typically the system will present one or two of the most optimal shows to remove from the schedule to achieve a good solution. In another embodiment, an adjacent show list is implemented. The adjacent show list contains metadata for the shows immediately before and after a sched-

uled show. The adjacent show list is used to disable user extended time for parental control reasons, so that an unauthorized user is not able to extend the transfer into the body of another show that they are not permitted to capture.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0015] The invention will be more fully understood by reference to the following drawings, which are for illustrative purposes only:

[0016] Figure 1 is a functional block diagram of an embodiment of a set-top box.

[0017] Figure 2 is a diagram of a configuration for one of the multiple tuners associated with the video recorder.

[0018] Figure 3 shows a configuration for a single decoder.

[0019] Figure 4 is a diagram of a typical tuner arrangement for use with a live TV signal.

[0020] Figure 5 is a diagram of a typical tuner arrangement for use when transferring a signal to a storage device.

[0021] Figure 6 shows an arrangement for when a user is watching a show that has already been transferred to a storage device.

[0022] Figure 7 shows an arrangement for when a user is watch-

ing a show on the storage device while another show is being transferred to the storage device.

[0023] Figure 8 is a block diagram showing the components of a scheduled show and its corresponding timeslots according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0024] Figure 9 is a flowchart showing how one embodiment of the present invention manually resolves conflicts.

[0025] Figure 10 is a flowchart showing how one embodiment of the present invention automatically resolves conflicts.

[0026] Figure 11 is a block diagram showing a process whereby an embodiment of the present invention searches future guide data to transfer, in order to solve a conflict.

[0027] Figure 12 is another flowchart showing how an embodiment of the present invention automatically resolves conflicts.

[0028] Figure 13 is a block diagram showing how a conflict might arise that requires a manual resolution simplification process.

[0029] Figure 14 is a flowchart showing a how an embodiment of the present invention produces the results of a manual resolution simplification process.

[0030] Figure 15 is a flowchart showing the management of a conflict according to one embodiment of the invention.

- [0031] Figure 16 is a flowchart showing the management of a conflict according to one embodiment of the invention.
- [0032] Figure 17 is a block diagram showing the implementation of an adjacent show list according to one embodiment of the invention.
- [0033] Figure 18 is a flowchart showing how one embodiment of the invention handles an adjacent show list.
- [0034] Figure 19 is a functional block diagram of a video recorder according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- [0035] The present invention is directed to a video recorder having user extended and automatically extended time slots. A video recorder as used herein refers to a device capable of transferring one or more broadcast signals to a storage device and retrieving the broadcast signals from the storage device. The terms video recorder, personal video recorder (PVR), and digital video recorder (DVR) are used herein interchangeably. Referring more specifically to the drawings, for illustrative purposes an embodiment of a video recorder is shown in the functional block diagram of FIG. 1.

VIDEO RECORDER

[0036] A video recorder 5 is an internal or external component of a set-top box 10. The video recorder 5 includes some or all of a combination of software, hardware, and firmware. In one embodiment, the video recorder 5 uses a storage device 6, such as a hard drive that is internal or external to the set-top box 10 where shows are saved. The set-top box 10 connects to an output device 20, which facilitates the use of broadcast signals, such as live television signals, video on demand broadcasts, downloads of Internet content, viewing of web pages, and viewing of content previously transferred to the storage device 6. In the example of FIG. 1, set-top box 10 is shown as being external to output device 20. It should be understood by someone having ordinary skill in the art, that set-top box 10 may be internal to output device 20 as well.

[0037] A GUI 7 that includes an IPG 8 is provided, which is displayed on the output device 20. GUI 7 in conjunction with IPG 8 allows the user to control the video recorder 5, typically using a remote control 60. For instance, the user may search the IPG 8 and select shows which are then scheduled to be transferred to storage device 6. The software or firmware that controls set-top box 10 may be installed locally or it may be downloaded from the Internet

as needed when configuring new set-top boxes or when updating existing ones.

[0038] Set-top box 10 is connected to output device 20 via a transmission line 30. Broadcast signals are received by the set-top box 10 via broadcast input source 40, which may be connected to either an antenna, cable television outlet, or other suitable input source. One or more tuner systems 45 are configured to allow the system to utilize broadcast signals from multiple channels. The video recorder component 5 includes a hard disk drive 6 in conjunction with a volatile memory 46, such as a Random Access Memory (RAM). Typically, the broadcast input along line 40 is handled by the tuner 45. The signal is temporarily resident in memory 46 using a circular buffer or other cache before being transferred more or less permanently to storage device 6. The tuner system 45 works in conjunction with the storage device 6 so that for each tuner in the system, each can simultaneously transfer broadcast signals to the storage device 6, or display channels up to the given number of tuners on output device 20.

[0039] Set-top box 10 receives power through a line 50. Set-top box 10 receives user input entered from a handheld remote control 60 over a wireless link 70. Wireless link 70

may be an infrared (IR) link, a radio frequency (RF) link, or any other suitable type of link. A bi-directional data path 80 is provided to set-top box 10, through which set-top box 10 can access the Internet 90. Transmission line 40 may provide data from a variety of input sources including cable, satellite, or electromagnetic waves.

TUNER MANAGEMENT

[0040] In one embodiment of the present invention, the PVR uses multiple tuners. Each of the tuners is normally associated with one encoder and one cache, which may be a fixed or variable size cache (for a live signal) or a fixed file in the case where the incoming signal is merely transferred to the storage device. Figure 2 shows various configurations for one of the multiple tuners associated with the PVR. Video stream 200 is provided to tuner 210, which passes the signal to encoder 220, which transfers the data in a cache 230. This configuration is used for analog use of a live TV signal.

[0041] An alternate configuration includes a video stream 240, which is then provided to tuner 245, which is then passed to encoder 250 and then to fixed file block 260. This configuration is useful for the analog transfer of a signal. For digital channels, encoder blocks 220 and 250 are re-

moved, since the signal has already been digitized.

[0042] Figure 3 shows a configuration for a single decoder.

Cache 300 provides data to decoder 310, which outputs video signal 320. This arrangement is useful for watching live TV. Alternatively, fixed file block 330 provides data to decoder 340, which outputs a video signal 350. This embodiment is useful for playing back a show that has already been transferred to the storage device.

[0043] Each decoder shown in FIG. 3 is associated with a tuner/encoder pair. For a live TV signal, FIG. 4 shows an example of a typical arrangement, where video signal 400 is transmitted to tuner 410 then to encoder 420 and to cache 430. After it leaves cache 430 it is decoded in block 440 and the outgoing video signal 450 is displayed on the television. It should be noted that a delay interval 460 of a given (x) number of seconds occurs between the time the signal reaches encoder 420 and is output by decoder 440. Therefore, a live TV signal is typically a signal that has been delayed by (x) seconds. If a user is watching a program and is currently transferring the program to a storage device as well, a cache, as shown in block 430 of FIG. 4 is not used. Instead, a fixed buffer 500, shown in FIG. 5 is used.

[0044] If the user is watching a show that has already been transferred to the storage device, the decoder is decoupled from the encoder (i.e., it reads from a different cache than the encoder), which continues to encode and cache the live video signal. This embodiment is shown in FIG. 6, where video signal 600 is tuned at block 605 and encoded at block 610 and stored in buffer 620. Fixed buffer 630 is used to provide data to decoder 640, which provides the output signal 650.

[0045] Finally, if a user is watching a show that resides already on the storage device while another show is currently being transferred to the storage device, two different fixed buffers are implemented. This embodiment of the present invention is shown in FIG. 7. Video signal 700 is tuned at block 705 and encoded at block 710 and stored in a first fixed buffer 720. A second fixed buffer 730 is used to watch the previously saved show, by transmitting and decoding the data at block 740 and displaying the output video signal 750 on a television.

SHOW SCHEDULING

[0046] A user might schedule a show in a number of ways that could potentially give rise to a conflict. In one scenario the user is watching a television broadcast and presses a but-

ton on a remote control intended to initiate a transfer of the current show to the storage device. At the same time, another show is already being transferred to the storage device on another channel and the system cannot transfer both simultaneously. Alternatively, the user may have scheduled a number of shows to automatically be transferred to the storage device, for instance by accessing an IPG and selecting shows and / or by setting up the automatic transfer of certain series or specific programs (a series manager). If at some time that number of shows scheduled to be transferred exceeds the number of available tuners, a conflict arises.

[0047] Whenever a user schedules a show, the complete timeslot the system needs to have a tuner available to transfer the show is partitioned into its respective component timeslots. Figure 8 gives an example of some of the components in a typical complete timeslot. Complete timeslot 800 has a start time 810 and an end time 820. Between start time 810 and end time 820 is the complete time slot. The timeslot 800 comprises automatically extended 830 and automatically extended trail time 840. Automatically extended times 830 and 840 are typically only for a few minutes and may be automatically added to every show

scheduled by the user. User extended lead time 850 and user extended trail time 860 are timeslots the user has manually asked the system to append to the actual show that comprises the core time 870 also referred to as the body of the show. Each component of the partitioned timeslot 800 is given a different priority and each is handled as a separate entity when the system attempts to resolve a conflict.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

[0048] An embodiment of the present invention is configured to process conflicts. A conflict occurs when the number of shows (or component timeslots) scheduled to be transferred to the storage device exceed the number of available tuners. For the purposes of this example, it is assumed for simplicity that the system has two tuners, although the system may have any number of tuners. In one scenario the user is watching a television broadcast and presses a button on a remote control intended to initiate a transfer of the current show to the storage device. The pressing of the button generates an instruction to the video recorder which causes it to schedule the show. At the same time, another show is already being transferred to the storage device on another channel.

[0049] Alternatively, the user may have instructed the system to schedule a number of shows to automatically be transferred to the storage device, for instance by accessing an IPG and selecting shows and / or by setting up the automatic transfer of certain series or specific programs in the series manager. If at some time that number of shows scheduled to be transferred exceeds the number of available tuners, a conflict arises. Moreover, the user may have automatically extended timeslots enabled on their system. If so, the time slot either leading or trailing the show may extend into the body of another show. If this event causes the number of available tuners to be exceeded, then a conflict arises. Also, a user may have extended a show either at the lead or trail end and this manual extension may run into the body of another program and cause a similar conflict.

[0050] When conflicts arise, the user will typically be given notice and an opportunity to correct (solve) the conflict manually before it occurs. However, if the user does not or is not available to interact with the system, then the system automatically solves the conflict. FIG. 9 is a flowchart giving an example of how one embodiment of the present invention identifies and finds solutions to conflicts manually.

[0051] At block 900 a user schedules shows (including user extended and automatically extended timeslots) that they want to transfer to the storage device, collectively this is called timeslot x. At block 910 it is determined if the number of available tuners during timeslot x is less than what is needed to completely transfer timeslot x and any other shows that are scheduled during that timeslot. (i.e., there is a conflict). If there is no conflict, the system transfers timeslot x at block 915 to the storage device, and block 900 repeats.

[0052] If there is a conflict then at block 920, the system provides the user with a manual resolution screen. An example of a manual resolution screen includes various choices to manually resolve the conflict. These include, for instance, cancel show A, cancel show B, do not schedule timeslot x, or trim shows A and/or B. Trimming the show includes, for instance, removing user extended or automatically extended timeslots. At block 930, it is determined if the user has solved the conflict manually by trimming or canceling shows A and/or B. If so, then timeslot x is added to the schedule queue at block 940 and flow proceeds to block 915. Otherwise, the user does not wish to schedule timeslot x, so the process is com-

plete.

[0053] In another embodiment of the present invention, the conflicts are resolved automatically. This embodiment is shown in Fig. 10, where at block 1000 shows are automatically scheduled to be transferred to a storage device (including user extended and automatically extended timeslots), collectively this is called timeslot z. Timeslot z may be scheduled for instance, by an automated process (series manager) configured to transfer every instance of a certain show, type of sporting event, genre, title, timeslot, etc. At block 1010 it is determined if the number of available tuners during timeslot z is less than what is needed to completely transfer timeslot z and any other shows that are scheduled during that timeslot. (i.e., there is a conflict). If there is no conflict, the system transfers timeslot z at block 1015 to the storage device, and block 1000 repeats.

[0054] If there is a conflict then at block 1020, the system examines the priorities of the conflicting timeslots (including timeslot z). At block 1030, it is determined if timeslot z is the lowest priority timeslot. If so, then timeslot z is not scheduled and the process is complete. Otherwise, timeslot z is added to the schedule queue at block 1040 and

block 1015 repeats.

[0055] In another embodiment of the present invention, shows that are not transferred because of a conflict remain in a separate list or queue waiting to be transferred later if an opportunity occurs. For instance, the missed transfer may be broadcast again the next day. The system will attempt to initiate the transfer automatically the next day when the show occurs if it is possible. Figure 11 shows how this process works according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0056] Guide data 1110, which contains the information needed to determine what shows are broadcast at certain times, is transferred to the set-top in portions over time. For instance, one day of guide data may be downloaded at a time as first portion 1140. A loop 1120 walks through the guide data by comparing each component of the guide data to show A 1100, which has been entered in a queue 1160. It is assumed for the purposes of Figure 11, that show B 1130 has previously scheduled and that show B has a higher priority than show A 1100. In this example, show A 1100 is not transferred and show B 1130 is transferred when loop 1120 reaches first guide data component 1105 of guide data 1110.

[0057] As a second portion 1170 of guide data 1110 is downloaded, for instance the next day, the system continues walking through the guide data 1110 using loop 1120. Eventually, the system matches show A 1100 in queue 1160 with a repeated airing of show A 1150 when the loop 1120 reaches a second component of the guide data 1155. At this point the system is able to transfer repeated show A 1150 and the conflict is solved, since original show A 1100 is transferred and show B 1130 was also transferred. From a user perspective this is satisfactory, since they have stored both broadcasts and if the user did not immediately try to watch original show A, the whole process occurred transparently to the user.

[0058] In one embodiment, queue 1160 described in connection with Fig. 11 comprises multiple queues that are used together to resolve conflict. Table 1 shows some of the queues used to resolve conflicts:

Table 1:

Name of Queue	Purpose
Saved Show Queue	Saved shows are placed in the saved shows queue along with shows that are actively being transferred to the storage device
Schedule Queue	Shows that are scheduled to be transferred to the storage device in the future are placed in this queue

Series Manager Queue	Each entry in this queue comprises a template having data about each series that is automatically transferred to the storage device. This includes, for instance, the series' title, genre, time, etc. The data is used, for instance to find matches in guide data entries when a loop walks the guide data.
Manually Deleted Queue	This queue contains shows the user has manually deleted from a series manager or schedule queue.
Adjacent Shows Queue	Contains entries about shows adjacent (before and after) shows in the schedule queue. It is used to prevent the system from transferring a portion of a show (user or automatically extended timeslot) that might have adult content.

[0059] Figure 12 is a flowchart showing how the queues described with respect to Table 1 are used when carrying out a process, such as the process described in Figure 10. At block 1200 a component of the guide data representing a show is examined. At block 1210, it is determined if the component of the block of guide data matches a pattern of a show in the series manager queue (i.e., the user intends to record this show every time it occurs). If not, block 1200 repeats on the next available component of the guide data. If so, then at block 1220, it is determined if that component of the guide data already resides in the saved show queue. If it does, then the show is not transferred, since it already has been saved, and block 1200 repeats. Otherwise, it is determined if the guide data

component is already in the schedule queue at block 1230. If so, then it is not acted upon and block 1200 repeats. Otherwise, it is determined if the show is in the manually deleted queue at block 1240. If so, it is not acted upon since the user has decided manually not to transfer the show anymore, so block 1200 repeats. Otherwise, it is determined if there is a conflict at block 1250. If not, the show is transferred to the storage device at block 1260. Otherwise, the conflict is resolved at block 1270.

MANUAL RESOLUTION SIMPLIFICATION PROCESS

[0060] When a PVR, DVR, or other video recording system has many tuners, there may be an exponentially large number of potential solutions that will solve a conflict. To simplify the interface that is presented to the user to manually resolve the conflict, the present invention typically selects one or two choices to present to the user that are most satisfactory. Figure 13 is a diagram showing how multiple solutions may occur.

[0061] Assume the user has scheduled a long show 1300 for transfer to the storage device. The long show may, for instance be a sporting event or a movie. Within complete timeslot reserved for long show 1300, short programs A 1320, B 1321, C 1322, D 1323, E 1324, and F 1325 are

also scheduled. Assuming the system under consideration has two tuners, three conflicts have arisen. There are multiple solutions to this conflict. A first solution is to choose A 1320, C 1322, E 1324, and long show 1300. A second solution is to choose B 1321, C 1322, E 1324, and long show 1300. There are a total of eight solutions to the present conflict. Instead of presenting the user with all eight solutions, the system, according to one embodiment, presents the user with only one or two optimal choices that will resolve the conflict.

[0062] Figure 14 is a flowchart describing the process of how an embodiment of the present invention finds and presents a user with a small amount of optimal choices to solve a conflict. The process begins at block 1400 where all conflicting programs / timeslots are obtained. At block 1410, all of the solutions are obtained and added to a list. At block 1420, each timeslot in the solution has its priority examined. At block 1430, a cumulative priority is given to the entry in the list based on the priorities of all of its timeslots involved in the solution. At block 1440, it is determined if there are any more entries for solutions in the list. If so, block 1420 repeats and the next solution entry in the list is prioritized. After the entire list is examined,

the system presents the user at block 1450 with one or two of the lowest priority solutions, so that the user may delete one of those solutions to solve the conflict.

SHOW PRIORITY

[0063] If there are instructions that cause a conflict for system resources, which prevent all the desired content from being transferred to the storage device, a prioritization system is used to determine which content is more desirable. This system is also used to determine undesirable content when deciding which shows to suggest to the user to delete in order to avoid conflicts as shown in Figure 14. Each time slot to be saved, based user instructions, is handled as a type. A first type may be, for instance, automatically extended time, while a second type may be a show's body (or core time). Table 2 shows some examples of the various typing of timeslots and the resulting priority, according to an embodiment of the present invention:

Table 2:

Type 1	Type 2	Priority
Currently being transferred to the storage device	Other content	Content 1 is given a higher priority.
Scheduled manually by the user to be transferred to the storage device	An episode automatically transferred to the storage device by a series manager	Content 1 is given a higher priority
Content automatically trans-	Content automatically trans-	The content with the highest se-

ferred to the storage device by a series manager	ferred to the storage device by a series manager	ries priority is chosen. The series priority may be set manually. One embodiment determines this by a position in a series queue. Shows closer to the top are more desirable
Equal priority as content 2	Equal priority as content 1	The longer content is given priority.
Automatically extended time	Not automatically extended time	The content that is not automatically extended time is given a higher priority
User extended lead time that extends into the body of content 2	Other content	The body of content 2 is preserved and the user extended lead time is not recorded
User extended trail time that is less than a fixed interval and extends into the body of content 2	Other content	The body of content 2 is preserved and the user extended trail time is not recorded. The fixed interval may be, for instance, 5 minutes.
User extended trail time that is greater than a fixed interval and extends into the body of content 2	Other content	The extended trail time is recorded and the body of content 2 is truncated.
User extended trail time	User extended lead time	User extended trail time is given a higher priority.

[0064] When the system finds one or more conflicts and priority is needed to solve the conflict, the flowchart of Figure 15 shows how one embodiment of the present invention resolves the conflict. The algorithm takes as input at block 1500 timeslots A and B, which are in conflict. Timeslots A and B are, for instance, the body of a show, user extended lead or trail time or automatically extended lead or trail

time. At block 1510, it is determined if timeslot A is automatically extended time. If timeslot A is automatically extended time, then it is determined at block 1520 if timeslot B is automatically extended time. If timeslot B is not automatically extended time, then timeslot B is given higher priority and the conflict is solved at block 1530.

[0065] If, however, at block 1510, timeslot A is not automatically extended time. Then it is determined at block 1540 if timeslot B is automatically extended time. If it is, then timeslot A is given a higher priority and the conflict is solved at block 1550. If, however, at block 1540, B is not automatically extended time or at block 1520, B is automatically extended time (meaning either both timeslots A and B are both automatically extended time or both are not automatically extended time) then at block 1560, it is determined if timeslot A is of a higher priority. If so then flow proceeds to block 1550. Otherwise, flow proceeds to block 1530.

[0066] If a conflict cannot be solved by using automatically extended time alone, then additional decision making algorithms are employed. These steps are invoked, for instance, when block 1560 of Figure 15 is reached. Figure 16 describes the steps that an embodiment of the present

invention takes when it reaches a situation such as block 1560 of Figure 15 when a conflict cannot be solved simply by not transferring the automatically extended time to the storage device. Figure 16 assumes that timeslot A comprises user extended time.

[0067] At block 1600 the algorithm takes as input a user extended timeslot in timeslot A and other content, such as the body of a show or user extended time in timeslot B. At block 1610, it is determined if timeslot A is user extended lead time. If so, then at block 1615, it is determined if timeslot B is the body of a show. If so, then timeslot B is given priority at block 1620, and the user extended lead time is not transferred to the storage device.

[0068] If, however, at block 1610, timeslot A is user extended trail time, it is determined at block 1630, if the user extended trail time is less than a fixed interval, five minutes, for instance. If so, then it is determined at block 1615 if timeslot B is the body of a show. If so, then flow proceeds to block 1620 and timeslot B is transferred to the storage device if it is the body of a show. Otherwise, the trail time exceeds the fixed interval, so at block 1640, timeslot A is given priority and transferred to the storage device, while timeslot B is truncated. Returning to block 1615, if times-

lot B is not the body of a show, then the timeslot with the highest priority is chosen at block 1650.

ADJACENT SHOWS

[0069] In one embodiment of the present invention, a list is maintained of shows that are adjacent to a show that has been scheduled to be transferred to the storage device. This is useful, for instance, for parental control reasons. It is used to prevent an unauthorized user, such as a child, from misusing user extended lead time and user extended trail time to extend a transfer into the body of another show that might have objectionable content. The adjacent show list contains metadata for each show that is adjacent to a scheduled show.

[0070] Figure 17 is a block diagram showing the lists that are used by an embodiment of the present invention. Program guide 1700 contains all of the shows the user can currently schedule. Show A 1710 has been selected by the user. Show A 1710 is placed in schedule list 1720. Shows X 1730 and Y 1740 are adjacent to show A 1710. Adjacent shows X 1730 and Y 1740 are placed in adjacent show list 1750. One or more metadata columns 1760 are associated with each entry. Currently a metadata entry 1770 is activated in association with show Y 1740. This is one way

in which a system is able to identify show Y 1740 as being one that needs parental control. For instance metadata column entry 1770 might indicate that show Y 1740 is rated R. Similarly, it might indicate that show Y 1740 is rated X or show Y 1740 has violent content, graphic language, nudity, other objectionable rating information such as being on a specific channel, a content advisory, etc. Since show Y 1740 has a metadata entry 1770 indicating that show Y 1740 violates a system content control, a user who has scheduled show A 1710 will not be able to enable user extended trail time to extend into the body of show Y 1740, without the proper authentication, PIN, key, or the like.

[0071] Figure 18 is a flowchart showing the process of using an adjacent show list according to one embodiment of the present invention. At block 1800, a user schedules a show to be transferred to the storage device. At block 1810, the system begins transferring the show to the storage device. At block 1820, the shows adjacent to the show currently being transferred are placed in an adjacent show list. At block 1830, the metadata for the shows in the adjacent show list is checked. At block 1840, it is determined if the metadata indicates that either show in the adjacent show

list contains content that might be restricted through parental controls. If so, the system blocks the show in the adjacent show list at block 1860. Otherwise, the system unblocks the show at block 1850.

[0072] After blocks 1850 or 1860, it is determined if the current time is within the current-metadata record at block 1870. This is accomplished, for instance, by using a playback head that moves sequentially in time as the current show is transferred. As the playback head reaches the end of the current show and moves to the next show in time, the system will discover that the metadata in the adjacent show list is no longer current. At that point the system updates the adjacent show list and block 1870 becomes false. When block 1870 becomes false, block 1820 repeats. Otherwise the system loops until block 1870 becomes false.

OVERALL SYSTEM

[0073] FIG. 19 is a functional block diagram that illustrates the components of an embodiment of the present invention. Note that FIG. 19 is intended to be a conceptual diagram and does not necessarily reflect the exact physical construction and interconnections of these components. Set-top box 10 includes processing and control circuitry

1900, which controls the overall operation of the system. Coupled to the processing and control circuitry 1900 are one or more TV tuners 1910, a storage device 1920, a communication device 1930, and a remote interface 1940.

[0074] Tuners 1910 receive broadcast signals on transmission line 1960, which may originate from an antenna, a cable television outlet, a satellite connection, or another suitable broadcast input source. Processing and control circuitry 1900 provides audio and video output to device 170 via a line 1970. Remote interface 1940 receives signals from remote control 60 via wireless connection 70. Communication device 1930 is used to transfer data between set-top box 10 and one or more remote processing systems, such as a web server 1980, via a data path 1990.

[0075] Processing and control circuitry 1900 may include one or more of devices such as general-purpose microprocessors, digital signal processors, application specific integrated circuits, various types of signal conditioning circuitry, including analog-to-digital converters, digital-to-analog converters, input/output buffers, etc. Storage device 1920 may include one or more physical memory devices, which may include volatile storage devices, non-volatile storage devices, or both. For example, storage de-

vice 1920 may include both random access memory (RAM), read-only memory (ROM), hard disk drives, various forms of programmable and/or erasable ROM, flash memory, or any combination of these devices.

[0076] Communication device 1930 may be a conventional telephone modem, an Integrated Services Digital Network adapter, a Digital Subscriber Line adapter, a cable television modem, or any other suitable data communication device. Logic 1995 typically is resident in storage device 1920. Logic 1995 controls the overall functionality of the system, including the GUI, IPG, and may also be used when the video recorder has been given conflicting instructions to transfer more shows to storage device 1920 than there are tuners 1910 available. For instance, an instruction might be generated from remote control 70 handled by the user. The instruction would be sent across line 70, through remote interface 1940, and to processing and control circuitry 1900 via logic 1995. Logic 1995 interprets and determines the action needed to be taken based on the instruction and might eventually store information in storage device 1920 that would allow the system to act on the instruction at the appropriate time.

[0077] One or more of the algorithms and processes described

herein to manually and/or automatically resolve conflicts are stored in logic portion 1995. These algorithms and other codes in logic portion 1995 are used, for instance, to recognize the existence of conflicts and to prioritize the conflicting programs to find solutions to the conflicts by using automatically extended time, user extended time, and core time, as well as other factors in assessing the priorities of conflicting timeslots.

[0078] Although the description above contains many specificities, these should not be construed as limiting the scope of the invention but as merely providing illustrations of some of the presently preferred embodiments of this invention. Thus the scope of this invention should be determined by the appended claims and their legal equivalents.